HOW TO DEAL WITH DOUBTS AND DOUBTERS

H. CLAY TRUMBULL

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HOW TO DEAL WITH DOUBTS AND DOUBTERS

ACTUAL EXPERIENCES WITH TROUBLED SOULS

By H. CLAY TRUMBULL

Author of "Individual Work for Individuals," "Illustrative Answers to Prayer," etc.

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1907

EVANGELICAL
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
235

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235

Preface

Any one who is familiar with the workings of the human heart knows that more persons are ready to question or doubt than to rest and trust. And it is ever easier to strengthen the faith of one who enjoys firm confidence in God and in the eternal verities of the universe, than it is to remove the ever-changing doubts in a mind which gives way to them. Hence practical suggestions as to wise ways of dealing with doubts and doubters are likely to be helpful to one who would serve God and help perplexed souls.

The following series of doubts expressed and doubts met is a result of actual experiences in heart-to-heart struggles in real life. While each chapter is not the literal record of a single doubter's words during a discussion with the narrator, all that is recorded of incident or utterance is veritable fact. In some instances the substance of several conversations is condensed into one; and in some cases similar doubts by different

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doubters are here given as if they were the doubts of a single doubter. But all the doubts were actually expressed by a doubter to the narrator, and were met by him in the line of thought now recorded. The result was in every case as here mentioned.

This by no means covers all the instances of perplexity in doubt in the narrator's personal experience. It is simply a series of actual experiences in dealing with doubts and doubters, where help was given by the methods here stated. If the methods given as successful should, by God's blessing, prove suggestive to other workers in similar fields, it will be an added cause of gratitude to

H. CLAY TRUMBULL.

PHILADELPHIA, *September* 11, 1903.

EVANGELICAL
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

Contents

I

CONSIDERING DOUBTS RATHER THAN BELIEFS 3

II

SEEKING HELP INSIDE OF SELF, NOT OUTSIDE 11

III

NOT READY TO GIVE UP ONE'S WILL . . 21

IV

WAITING TO BE GOOD ENOUGH TO JOIN THE CHURCH 29

V

WAITING FOR SOMETHING INSIDE TO "BREAK" 35

VI

FACING "THE UNPARDONABLE SIN" . . 43

VII

WAITING FOR MORE FAITH 51

VIII

Troubled Because Enjoying God's Service 61

IX

Considering Our Desires, Instead of God's Love 70

X

Is Lack of Right Feeling a Barrier to Right Action? 83

XI

Troubled Because Finding No Enjoyment in Prayer 90

XII

Unable to Believe in Miracles . . . 99

XIII

Not Believing in Any Spiritual Existence 111

XIV

Inconsistency of Christian Doubters . 123

Introduction

I am grateful for the opportunity to say a word in introduction of this new edition of "How to Deal with Doubts and Doubters," regarding Dr. Trumbull, whose friendship is prized by those who possessed it as among the rarest and divinest treasures of their lives.

Dr. Trumbull was born in Stonington, Conn., on June 8th, 1830, and died in Philadelphia, December 8th, 1903. Every young man should read the biography written by his son-in-law, Philip E. Howard, entitled "The Life Story of Henry Clay Trumbull." No sketch can do justice to his most varied career as business man, Sunday-school worker, army chaplain, editor, writer, Christian teacher and friend of young men. At his funeral service, his pastor, Dr. Dana, briefly recalled the outline of his life. "Coming from that distinguished family to which Brother Jonathan Trumbull, of Revolutionary memory, belonged, he inherited what some call that troublesome New Eng-

land conscience, which kept him faithful to truth and duty to the end.

"After finishing his academic studies at Williston, Massachusetts, owing to impaired health he was not able to pass through Yale University as he had intended, a bitter disappointment at that time. He never had any training in a theological seminary. Later on he came to believe that these seeming hindrances were part of the Divine plan in helping him to his best life's work. Instead of the college, he had a brief but valuable experience in political life, on the stump, in managing a campaign, in learning how to influence and control men. He was for a short time in a bank and in a railroad office, acquiring a knowledge of business which was a great assistance in after years.

"It was while at business in Hartford that he was led to become a Christian through the earnest letter of a loving friend. This power of one man over another so impressed him that he began at once personal Christian effort for others, which he continued through life.

"Very soon he was engaged in general

Sunday-school work in Connecticut. Then came the call to arms in those historic days of 1861. Urged to become a chaplain in the Tenth Connecticut Regiment, he was ordained to the Christian ministry, a step which he probably would not have taken except that the office of chaplain demanded it.

"His preaching in the army was the result of careful preparation. His sermons were usually written in full, with texts and illustrations especially adapted to the occasion. His courage under fire, his fine Christian constancy, won him the admiration and affection of men and officers alike. As General Terry once said of him: 'No officer of his regiment has displayed more gallantry in action or done more to animate men to do their duty.'

"He came out of the war one of the few distinguished chaplains. At that time he had special gifts as a platform speaker and was sought for by religious conventions, by schools and colleges. Though several churches invited him to become their pastor, he preferred to go back to Sunday-school work in Connecticut until he was urged to become the

Editor of *The Sunday School Times,* which he ultimately purchased." This work and all the rich Christian activities which he associated with it engaged him until the end of his life.

He was to scores of us younger men our greatest religious teacher. He taught us three great lessons, the greatest lessons that man can teach to men. He showed us the supremacy of truth. Where everything he wrote and said was so evidently only the unveiling of himself, a sort of fragrant moral exhalation, it would not be true to single out any one of his books and say, "This was the distinctive expression of his teaching and of himself," yet I think that one of the three or four of which this might most truthfully be said is his little book in defense of the absolute inviolability of truth. With truth compromised, he felt the foundations were gone. Life might be sacrificed. God, he held, was taking life daily, even as His Son had laid down His own. What God could do he could authorize man to do, but God could not lie, and what was impossible to the nature of God was intolerable in the character and

ways of men. The truth was to him a holy thing, and he abhorred with all his stern soldier soul all falsehood and every lie.

He taught us the glory of love. He thought himself, when he had finished it, that "Friendship the Master Passion," as he called it, was his great book, and he believed that he had demonstrated that there is no power in the world like unselfish love. No teacher of our generation saw as he saw the nature of that love which St. John tells us is God. Beside his conception, all other ideals and all books on friendship seem tawdry and of a lower world.

He taught us what life is. This is what he was dealing with in his covenant books, on the covenants of blood, of the threshold and of salt. Institutions, he held, were the symbols of life. He taught the reality of true commingling. The mysticism of the Gospel lay like the veil and the unveiling of immortality across our mortal life. He held to the truth of a divine intercourse. This was what life was to be, a fellowship with the divine

life, a union of our souls with the great life of our Father, who is God.

And what he taught he was. No discord severed the message from the man. What we heard from his lips we saw in his life. He loved the truth. No shadow of insincerity tinged him. The light of a great honor was in him, and the air where he was was pure and purified. He would go anywhere for his friends, and no service could be a sacrifice for one he loved. I have known him to make long journeys simply to make some truth which he thought it was important for a friend to have clear to that friend's mind. He stopped the press on his paper, and held up an entire issue to cut out of a review of a friend's book a single phrase, which he had just discovered, which might be misunderstood and grieve his friend. We may have many more friends, but we shall never have a greater friend than he was, and is. And how athrill with life he was! No one could come near him and not feel the tingle and deliverance of it. The lines about his eyes spoke with an irresistible eloquence of delight. He was all alive in his body. And

the mind was even more quick and vital. It shrank from anything commonplace and mediocre. It leaped at the living aspects of truth. It sprang past the inadequacy of systems to the infinite life that cannot be codified. The buoyancy, the intensity, the unassailable certainty of that life equally hid and exposed with Christ in God, the naturalness in the supernaturalness, the assurance, the humility, the living, eager joy of it all—what irrefutable, what positively convincing, what tenderly persuasive evidence this bore to the reality of his doctrine, that it was all so incarnate in his own dear life.

And this was the great characteristic of it all. It was so generous. It gave itself out without reserve or weariness. For nearly two generations he has been addressing multitudes on the platform or by the pen, but he counted truly that all the immense influence exerted in this way was less than what God had done through him by personal contact with individuals, men and women, and, also, with many who were but little more than boys and girls, to win them to Christ, to

truth, to love, to life. He found individuals everywhere. He loved the possibilities in them, and he sought with a tact that was unfailing and a courage that always, as he confessed, was needed before he could conquer the instinct of hesitation, but that never failed, to make those possibilities real, and to recover life to itself and to the Saviour.

He showed us what it is to be free. This blessing he also brought to us all—I mean to us young men who loved him. Often we went to him for counsel. "What shall we do?" He would not answer that. "Shall I go here, or there?" He would not say. He would show us the principles which he believed to be involved, and then he would say no more. "You must decide for yourself," was his word. He strove to give us the mind of Christ, and then he bade us do as we had a mind to. He was free in Christ, and he would have us free. He held to the law, to be sure, but he saw even in the Ten Commandments a covenant of love. Love, he believed with the Apostle, was the fulfilling of the law, and that he was the freeman whom love and truth made free in

Christ to render a full and joyous obedience.

He was full of large expectations of good. His faith was in God, and therefore his heart was stayed in hope. He was impatient with the easy talk of the day about the retrogression of religion, and the diminished study of the Bible. He was sure, and rightly so, that there never has been so much belief in the Bible, or study of it, or love for it, as at this day. God could not lose him. How could He lose the world? The faith of the Resurrection past and the hope of the Advent yet to come, bound for him the horizon of a world of the goodness and greatness of God, full of the assurance of the triumph of the Saviour.

This little book on doubt and ways of helping doubters reveals his spirit, his sympathy, his good sense and practical wisdom. May it lead on those who read it to read the other writings of one of the freshest and truest, the most earnest and original personalities of our time.

ROBERT E. SPEER.

New York, May 1, 1907.

HOW TO DEAL WITH DOUBTS AND DOUBTERS

237

I

Considering Doubts Rather Than Beliefs

A man has more power through believing one thing than in disbelieving ten thousand things. It is a man's duty to disbelieve, or to doubt, at a proper time, when the matter has been well considered; but no man is capable of disbelieving, or of doubting, intelligently and sensibly, unless he first has strong and positive beliefs. A man's real power either to do or to doubt starts from his beliefs, and if a man gives attention to what he does not believe, rather than to what he does believe, he makes no progress, and he lacks practical power in any direction.

Governor Andrew, of Massachusetts, who was a man of tremendous convictions, and who made thousands believe as he believed because he had those convictions,

said, just before the opening of the Civil War, of Abraham Lincoln, "I'm glad we've got a man now who believes something." And that was good ground for our hope in those days, as it is in any day. Yet to-day, on every side, there are young men and older men who think little about their beliefs, or about their convictions if they have any, and much of their disbeliefs and doubts and questionings.

Such persons are not always proud that they are so ready to doubt and to question; sometimes they regret the tendency of their minds to work in this direction, but it seems to them that they are helpless through the constitution and nature of their very being. Many of these persons feel the need of help, and sometimes ask it from others. What can be done for these persistent doubters? How can those who disbelieve and question continually, concerning matters about which they would fain be at rest in their minds, be helped to a wise dealing with their mental and spiritual troubles?

Very often one's best way of dealing with one's doubts is by letting them alone, and refusing to consider them just now. I heard Dr. Bushnell, in giving the charge to a keen-minded young pastor, say on this point: "If you have doubts that trouble you very much, do not try to solve them at once. Hang them up in your study for a while, and attend to things that you have no doubt about. By and by, when you have leisure, and feel so inclined, take your doubts down. Very likely you will find, when you attempt to examine them anew, that they have settled themselves." There was a world of wisdom in that bit of advice by Dr. Bushnell.

One who had been brought up in comparative strictness of belief reached a time when she began to question the truth of one doctrine and another that in her early life she had accepted as correct because others to whom she looked up said so. Dwelling on her new disbeliefs, she came to be practically controlled by them. In

her troubles of mind, she was telling me one day of certain views of truth that she could not now believe. At this I said to her: "You say a good deal of what you do *not* believe; why don't you say something of what you *do* believe, however little that is?" That was a fresh thought to her. She took it home, and acted on it. It proved a turning-point in her life. She began to consider what she did believe, and to find comfort in the thought of this. Her disbelief vanished out of sight, as the darkness in a room vanishes when a window is opened to the light. She came to find pleasure in leading others to see and know the truth, and she often told me afterwards that her new start was taken when she began to think of what she *did* believe, instead of what she did *not*. In this she simply illustrated a truth that is always worth considering by one who would help, or be helped, in the perplexity of doubting.

A young man who had been for years

active in Christian work and study, and whose desire and purpose were to be in the ministry, came to me at one time in Northfield and told me his story, asking if there could be any cure in his case. He said that he had wrestled first with one doubt, and then with another, but his doubts had grown faster than his wrestlings, and he had lost ground steadily, until at last he had nothing left to be sure of except that there is a God. He positively was not sure of any truth in the Bible or Christianity except just that.

At this I seemed not at all surprised, but simply asked: "What do you think of murder as a regular business?"

"I don't understand your question," said the young man.

"Why, the Bible teaches that murder is wrong. I want to know what *you* think of murder as a business, apart from the question of the statute law on the subject."

"I have no doubt about the moral law laid down in the Bible," was the response of the young man.

"Then there's one thing in the Bible that you believe, outside of the truth that there is a God."

Then I went on to ask one question after another as to some point of duty enjoined, or wrong act forbidden, in the Bible, to every one of which the young man said frankly that he had no doubt as to that point. He believed that the Bible teachings were to be believed so far.

"Do not think, my friend, from my unexpected questions, that I lack sympathy with you in your troubles of mind," I said to the young man; "but you told me, to begin with, that you had no sure belief except that there is a God, and now at my questions you have told me that you have a firm belief as to a good many other things. Now I want to interrupt this conversation just here for twenty-four hours. Go to your room, and take up the Bible. Turn over its pages, and when you see a statement that you believe, make a note of it. If you find anything that you do not

believe, or that you doubt, pass it by,—pay no attention to that for now. I want you to look for things in the Bible that you believe, and to count them up as a whole when you have done with the examination. Keep your mind entirely on what you are sure of, and then see, when you are through with the search, whether it really amounts to anything worth holding on to. Come back to-morrow, and tell me the result of your search."

The next day I watched for the young man, but he did not call. The day following, I met him on the street, and asked him why he had not returned to continue the conversation. There was a new look on his face as he replied:

"I went home that night, and began to look in the Bible for things that I believe. I found more of them than I thought for. I kept finding them. As you requested, I didn't stop to consider anything that I had a doubt about, so that I don't know from *this* search what there is in that line; but I

find so much that I do believe that I've come to the conclusion that I believe pretty much everything now."

And there was one more soul made newly glad, changed from gloom to cheer, from doubt to confidence, through God's blessing, by his simply looking at what can be believed, instead of what may have been doubted. That is the way for such a doubter to deal with his troubles of mind. If one would give help to a doubting Christian of this sort, let him bear this in mind.

II

Seeking Help Inside of Self, not Outside

It really is strange how many seek relief from their doubts, and help in their mental and spiritual unrest, by looking within instead of looking without. It would seem as if some actually expected to find a Saviour, or at all events to find evidences of their salvation, by an examination of their inner state of mind and being, and in the play of their personal feelings. This foolish custom was far more common a century ago than it is to-day; yet there are still many who do themselves harm, while they get absolutely no good, by indulging in this pernicious and unscriptural endeavor.

In my own case, I suffered much by such hopeless and injurious efforts to gain some evidence from my emotions or my con-

scious course of conduct, that I was truly a child of God, and might trust as such. The more I studied myself, the more I was dissatisfied with myself. Again and again I heard it said, or I read the statement in books of religious counsel, that the way to be rid of doubts about one's spiritual condition was to be actively at work for Christ. Yet I knew that that was no prescription for my case. I was engaged in specific Christian work seven days in the week, and the more I did of such work the less spiritual comfort I had. I was a constant sufferer in my habit of searching my inmost being for evidences of my Christian fidelity that were not to be found there.

Some told me that I should carefully examine myself, and decide what I would do in a test case, as showing whether I was a child of God, or one of God's enemies. This experiment I tried again and again, but I had to admit to myself that I was really seeking personal comfort or gain in this effort, and not putting God's glory

THEOLOGY

foremost, regardless of my feelings or interest. I really gained nothing, while I lost strength and rest and peace, in my desire to find a hope of salvation within myself. As the years passed on in this mistaken and useless search, I had less and less enjoyment in Christian activities, in which I still persevered, and I suffered more and more keenly in my self-reproaches because of my lack of hope and of spiritual repose.

This was after years of Christian work in my army chaplaincy and in my Sunday-school missionary work. In a sense, the more I did the worse I felt. My exhaustion in and through my well-doing incapacitated me for calm and sensible self-examination. Often, after several services on the Lord's Day, I have actually agonized for hours on my room floor, vainly seeking spiritual rest by means of internal evidence that I was a child of God.

One day I said despondently to a mature Christian believer, whom I had known from boyhood:

"I wish I could have some rest in my Christian faith."

"Why shouldn't you have? You know that you are a Christian, and that Christ takes care of you all the time, and for all time," said my friend.

"No, I don't know that I *am* a Christian," I replied, "and that's the trouble."

"You know that you want to be a Christian, and that if the choice were left to you, and you understood it, you'd decide for Christ's service."

"No, I can't say that I do know that," I replied, despondently.

My friend, seeing my real condition, caught hold of me, and said sharply:

"Stop that analyzing of your insides, and look up. Turn away from yourself, and look at your Saviour."

That blunt putting of the truth was a turning-point in my mind and in my spiritual life. I had long enough sought help inside without gaining it. Now I looked up where it could be found, and my being

was at rest. From that day on to the present I could never be induced to examine myself for evidences of salvation. I have looked up for help, and I have urged others to do likewise.

One day there came to me a student, brought up under Christian influences, and said to me:

"I am troubled all the time because I can't be sure that I'm a Christian."

Perceiving his condition of mind, I responded:

"Why should you be a Christian?"

"Why *should* I be a Christian? I don't know what you mean by such a question."

"Is there any command in the Bible for you to be a Christian? I don't remember any such. Is there any promise of salvation to Christians? Are you sure that you could be saved if you were a Christian?"

"You bewilder me," said the doubter.

"I want you, my friend, to look squarely at the important matter you came here to

talk about. Whom did Jesus Christ come into this world to save?"

"Sinners."

"Are *you* a sinner?"

"Yes," came out heartily, "I've no doubt about that."

"You are not deceiving yourself now with a false hope, my friend?"

"I think not," and a feeble smile played over the doubter's face. "I think I can feel sure on *that* point, whatever other doubt I have."

"Well, now, my friend, you see for yourself how the case stands. Jesus Christ came into this world to save sinners. *You* are one of that sort; *I'm* another. You say that you can't satisfy yourself that you are a Christian. I was in the same fix for years. But you do know that you are a sinner. *I* also felt sure on that point. So I came as a sinner to trust Christ as a Saviour. I advise you to do the same, leaving out of mind for a century or so the matter of being sure of being a Christian. Let us trust

the Saviour of sinners as *our* Saviour, and let us find joy in working for him."

And another troubled doubter became a cheerful, trustful, saved sinner, by being helped to look outside of himself, instead of inside. He was for years active in leading others, in the home field and in the foreign field, to trust the Saviour of sinners as *their* Saviour.

Christ is above us; let us look to him. *That* is the direction in which to look, in order to get rest and peace. It is so for those who are troubled with doubts. It is so for those who are ready to trust. This is a thought for all who would give help to such doubters, and who would lead to rest and peace troubled and anxious souls.

It is so with all who are looking within for evidences of their acceptance with Christ. Christ, not the sinner, is the evidence. One who has once learned this lesson is not willing again to leave the sure reality for any fancied substitute. One who

was mistakenly trying to induce doubters to be satisfied as to their condition by self-examination told, in my hearing, the following illustration used by Theodore Monod, of Geneva, that the speaker thought might help another.

"You find in your heart evils, defects, imperfections, and you feel that that heart is not worthy of being counted precious by Jesus Christ. But even a diamond, when it is first taken by the lapidary, is often rough and soiled and hidden from sight by foul accumulations; yet it is a diamond, nevertheless. Then the lapidary cleanses and cuts and finishes the rough diamond, and makes it fit to be set in the crown of a sovereign. Thus with your rough and defiled and uncut jewel of a soul. It is a diamond, and it is to shine in the diadem of the King of kings. Be sure of that."

As I had suffered for years in looking inside for evidences of salvation, or of my worthiness, I responded heartily to this illustration:

"I've all confidence in the Lapidary, but no confidence in the uncut stone, so far as my case is concerned. I never found any rough diamond inside of me. But I am told that, chemically, charcoal and the diamond dust have much in common. Now, when I look inside of myself, I see the charcoal. So I say to the great Lapidary: 'I bring you this charcoal, and I trust you to transmute it, by your almighty power, into a diamond. Then, in infinite love, place that diamond in your diadem, and to thee be all the glory.'"

When I said this, a fellow-believer who had been troubled with doubts as to his spiritual condition through his habit of looking inside for grounds of hope, instead of looking above for assurance of a Saviour, seemed touched by this view of the ground of hope, which was fresh to him. Speaking out heartily and with new hope, he said:

"I can find charcoal inside of me every time. There's no lack of that comfort for me."

And he turned his thought from the material to be transmuted to the all-powerful Lapidary. I then realized afresh that the way for a sinner to find hope is by looking up to the Saviour of such sinners as himself. Is there any better way than this to deal with doubts on such a point?

III

Not Ready to Give Up One's Will

A friend called on me one day, desiring to secure my aid in reaching spiritually a man whose condition seemed sadly involved, if not, indeed, desperate. The man in behalf of whom counsel and help were sought had been prominent and efficient in a large and prosperous business enterprise; but he had, by failing health, been for some time confined to his home. While thus shut in, his business, of which he was chief manager, had become hopelessly involved, and bankruptcy stared him in the face. Meantime his physician informed the man's wife, although not communicating the fact to him, that he was not likely to recover from his present illness. In heaviness of heart, she had sent the mutual friend to implore my effort to bring her husband nearer to her Saviour. While upright in character

and reverent in spirit, the sick man was averse to conversation on the subject of personal religion, and even in his illness had declined to have his wife send for a clergyman.

Although I had well known the man in former years in another place, I had never visited him in his present home, and it would be a delicate matter to make the first visit for the avowed purpose of reaching spiritually one in such trouble. Yet the request was an earnest one, and I could not refuse to respond to it. Imploring God to prepare the way for the interview, and to guide in it, I called at the sick man's house one Sunday afternoon. By God's ordering I could not see him then, as he was asleep when I called. So, seeing his wife, I left an old friend's love for her husband, and came away.

On learning of this call when he awoke, the man regretted his failure to see his old friend, and sent word desiring me to call again. On my second call, I had the ad-

vantage of coming at the sick man's request, and the interview was a natural and free one. The man told of his misfortunes and regrets. As he spoke, I said naturally that he certainly needed in his troubles, and I hoped he could have, his Saviour's sustaining presence. At this he spoke with some bitterness of his hopeless helplessness, and he then indicated his realest source of doubts. He was a man of diminutive appearance, but of intensest energy and enterprise. Unaided, he had fought his way up to success, in spite of many difficulties and obstacles.

"I know what you would say to me," he said. "All I have got to do is to give up my own will, and trust myself to the Saviour to take care of me. 'Give up my *will?*' But all there is of me is will. I started life a poor, sick boy, with nothing but will. My will kept me alive. By my will, I worked my way to success. By my will, I built up a great business, and had prosperity and a good home. By my will,

I supported my parents, and helped others to do well. But sickness came, and, while sick, my business broke down, and all I have in the world is likely to be swept away. Everything is gone but my *will.* And now you ask me to give up that. You don't know what it is you would be counseling. Everything else but my will is gone, and now you ask me to give up that. What would be left of me if that were gone?"

"But I have not advised you to give up your will," I replied. "You need a stronger will, not an abandonment of all that now remains of you. Your own will, strong as it is, with its present hold, could not keep you from sickness, could not continue success to you in your business. You need more will, not less. Wouldn't a touch of Omnipotence help you, in your present state? I think that if you, with your strong will, will lay hold on One who is all-powerful, and who can do even those things which you confess you are unable

to do even when you long to do them, you will be using your will in the right direction, and will have more will and a better will than ever."

This was to him a new way of looking at *will*. He who had ever wanted to use his will aright, in response to the question whether he would like me to pray with him that he could lay hold with a strong grip on the All-Sufficient Will, said that he most surely would. And as I kneeled, on that first visit in that sick-chamber, and prayed with and for that sick man, who had no idea of his wasting illness, I was sure that my old friend was finding joy in the thought that his will could, in Christ, keep him through all trial and sorrow, through life and through death, giving him final success in God's way. And from that hour it was apparent that he was grateful that God had chosen this way to lead him to a right understanding of the gain of a strong will properly directed.

The following months, when I went

every few days to cheer that new believer's heart and to strengthen my own grateful faith by Christian counsel with that glad saint as he was ripening for glory, I found that talk about his *will* had given place to loving words about his *Saviour*. Rarely is one to be met who has fuller joy and peace in Christ than had this man who had feared the barrier of his determined will. He had long lived a life of purity in duty-doing in God's service, but he had been mistaught as to what was required of him if he would be one with Christ. He had confounded his determined purpose in whatever he had to do, with wrong self-seeking. When he saw the light, he turned to it, and rejoiced in it. He seemed to have forgotten that he had any troubles.

He spoke only of the bright side of his present or his future. When he realized that he had not long to live, he was ready to see better things in prospect than he had ever ventured to hope for. His grateful and glad-hearted wife found cheer and

gave him cheer as they communed together of their Saviour's love and constant presence. Each day seemed brighter than any that had gone before. As to his will, he did not have to give it up, but only to lift it up.

Fresh trials came to him as he lay helpless in that invalid-chamber, which proved to be his death-chamber; but he had now strength and faith to bear them all. His aged mother, whom he had for years supported, was stricken with a fatal disease. The knowledge of this was kept from him, lest he should be unable to bear it. But when she was dead, they were compelled to tell him of it. He received the intelligence with joyous faith. He said pleasantly:

"It will not be long before we shall be together again."

It was evident that life with Christ was already more real and precious to him than this earthly life. His will was still unbroken, but it was now wisely directed.

And when at last he bade me farewell as he entered peacefully into rest, he seemed glad of the lesson he had freshly learned, that one who wants to do his duty needs not to have less will, or determination, but to have his strongest will, or purpose, rightly directed toward his loving and all-sufficient Saviour. Thus directed, the more *will* a man has, the better it is for him in God's service.

IV

Waiting to be Good Enough to Join the Church

Among the mistaken ideas in the community as to the significance of the act of connecting one's self with a Christian church, is the thought that it indicates that one has made progress in character and well doing, and desires to testify to that fact before his fellows. Underneath this error there is, of course, a mistaken view of the nature and object of the church itself, but how to correct this mistaken view must be decided differently in different cases.

When I had for some time been absent from my old home, I found, on returning to it, that a near neighbor of mine had just connected himself with the church. Glad to learn this fact, I went to that neighbor, and said to him heartily:

"I'm very glad to know that you have

taken the step of connecting yourself with the church, and I want to congratulate you on it."

To my surprise the new communicant said, with a show of modesty, and yet with a somewhat confident air:

"Well, I thought the matter over for some time before taking that step. I know I'm not so good as I might be, but I'm better than the average, so I decided to join the church."

At this I thought it not best to say anything more in the line of congratulation. Nor did I think that the church was to be particularly congratulated on its new member. Later on I found that other men than that neighbor had that standard of fitness for church-membership. Some are modest in their doubting, honestly thinking themselves unworthy to be counted with the Christian host. Others desire to live as well as they can outside of the church fold without being judged by church standards of conduct. Yet others again, like the per-

son instanced, have only a doubt as to their relative goodness, and settle it by themselves in a self-confident mood.

A church-goer, who desired to be right and to do right, when urged to connect himself with the church, expressed the fear that he was not good enough. This seemingly was his sincere feeling. For years he waited outside in the hope that he would grow better. Appeals from his friends for another course were of no avail. Then he was taken seriously ill, and he was brought to face death. As he prayed for recovery, and as he was prayed for, he seemed to have a different view of Christ; and when he was restored to health, he was glad to think of his Saviour as one to whom he ought to show gratitude. When his pastor urged him to come into the church, as one who desired to evidence his thankfulness and trust, he came forward as a loving, trusting follower of Christ. It were better to come just as he was, he thought, than to wait outside indefinitely to grow better.

A man of upright walk in life persistently refrained from connecting himself with the church, claiming that he loved and trusted Christ as his Saviour, and that he would show to the world that he was doing this without being a member of any church. At this I said to him:

"Do you expect Christ to save you?"

"Assuredly I do."

"Yet you persist in refusing to confess Christ before men, as he has particularly enjoined it upon you to do. Is that fair? Jesus says, 'Every one therefore who shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father who is in heaven.' Yet you say that you are not willing to be with those who confess Christ before men."

"Oh! I am ready to be known as a lover of Christ, but I don't want to be in the church where men claim to be better than other men. I will try to be as good as they are without saying so."

"You apparently mistake the idea of Christ's church, to begin with," I said.

"The church is not an exhibition hall, where good men and women show themselves. The church is a hospital where are those who need and want to be saved by Christ. Yet, as I understand you, you are unwilling to be counted as one who needs the hospital or the Great Physician, but you want to stand off outside and prove that you can cure yourself. Is that making an honest show?"

"I don't want to have it look that way."

"I shouldn't think you would."

So another man concluded to join the church, not because he thought he was as good as the average, but because he felt he needed hospital treatment as much as the average church-member.

It is important for every person who is in the church to bear in mind this truth as to the nature and mission of the church. It is not as an exhibition hall, but as a hospital, that it calls for members and that members continue in it. No man has made such progress in the Christian life

that he no longer needs the helps that the church supplies to him. The more progress one makes the more he desires progress. If he feels that he is good enough to be a church-member, he gives evidence that he has no right view of the church of Christ, or of right life in Christ.

V

Waiting for Something Inside to "Break"

A barrier to the conscious service of Christ is, with many souls, the fear that a desired and necessary change in their inner being has not taken place. This fear is commonly caused by a sad error on their part, resulting from the wrong preaching and teaching to which they have listened, or from their misreading of the Bible as improperly translated, or as incorrectly understood. But whatever has caused it, the barrier, real or supposed, often exists, and it must be met and wisely dealt with.

As illustrative of a multitude of similar cases, a single instance may be cited out of my sphere of observation. A prominent man in a New England community had been brought up under the best re-

ligious influences then prevalent in that region. He had from boyhood been accustomed to read the Bible and pray day by day. He was regular in church attendance. He was careful and strict in his morals. But all this was, as he had been taught, of the outer man; it did not touch or indicate the inner life or spiritual being. He had been taught from the pulpit and by the religious literature of the day, that until he had been converted, or regenerated, he would have no right to count himself an accepted child of God. And for this change, which he had no power to compass, he waited and hoped and prayed.

When he grew up and married he was ready to do anything and everything in his own power to show his readiness and desire to be Christ's, but for the essential change of spiritual nature he felt he must wait God's time and act. He was faithful in personal and household worship. He conducted family prayers regularly. He asked a blessing at his table. He taught

a class of young men in the Sunday-school. But he felt he had no right to count himself a converted, a regenerated, a new-born, soul. All that he could do in God's service he was ready to do, but conversion, or regeneration, was God's work. For that he must wait God's time and method. More than half a century passed away, leaving him as it found him so far as this was concerned.

His children, brought up under these influences, were led by their Sunday-school teachers and companions to confess Christ as their Saviour, and they became active as teachers and as church workers. But the good and sad-hearted man remained outside the recognized fold of Christ. This was so to the last of his earthly life. It was doubtless a blessed surprise to him when he was welcomed by his Saviour as one of his loved ones, when his spirit-eyes were opened beyond the veil of flesh. Yet that good man was only one of multitudes who have lived and died in Christ's service

thinking that they had no right to trust Christ as their Saviour because some mysterious change, which they could neither understand nor secure, had not been wrought in them. What a realm of doubt and of doubters is opened before us by such an illustration!

Years after this, which was my first acquaintance with one of the "outside saints," —kept outside by the barrier of doubt raised by mistaken teaching, — I was brought into close association with another doubter of the sort, who was even more positive, although less intelligent, than the other, on the subject. The son of a godly and strict father, whose views in the line of a certain phase of old-fashioned orthodoxy were pronounced and outspoken as to man's inability of himself to turn to God, was near me socially, and sat near me in church. In him I became much interested, and I sought to lead him to an open confession in Christ's service. But I found that the young doubter was positive as to

his right or power to act until God made him willing and able. In response to the most tender and earnest invitation, he said:

"I wish I could trust Christ as my Saviour, but I know it isn't possible until my heart is changed."

"But have you nothing to do in the matter?"

"My part is to wait and be ready. I come to church and prayer-meeting regularly. God knows how I feel about it, but until he converts me I cannot be a Christian. I cannot convert myself. So there it is."

That erroneous view was a barrier of doubt. My words, with my knowledge and experience of them, unfortunately did not move it or him.

In another case, one with whom I prayed was helped to imagine that he had evidence that God helped him over that barrier, and his fancy was suggestive as showing the working of many a man's mind. He was a man who had been a

soldier in my regiment in the Civil War. After the war, when I was preaching on a Sunday evening in the pulpit of a friend, in Massachusetts, I saw this man before me. At the close of the service the man came up to greet me, and I invited him to go with me to the pastor's house for a talk. He came, and we were soon together in a room by ourselves. After a few words over old experiences, a conversation somewhat like this ensued:

"Have you ever confessed Christ as your Saviour?"

"No, I have not; but I wish I could."

"Are you ready to give yourself to Christ with all your heart?"

"Indeed I am. But I suppose I must be converted."

"God will take care of that, if you will commit yourself to him without keeping anything back."

The man had been a good soldier in war time, and he knew what enlisting meant.

"Are you ready to enlist in Christ's ser-

vice here and now, not merely for three years, but for all time?"

"I am, and I'd like to."

Then we two dropped on our knees together, and I told the Lord that here was a new recruit who wanted to be under Christ's flag, and in the Saviour's service. I asked the Lord to accept him and to help him to be true.

As we rose from our knees, the hearer of the evening, with the light of joy in his face, exclaimed jubilantly:

"Chaplain, it's all right now. I'm sure it is. When you prayed there, I felt something sort o' break inside of me. I think I needn't have any doubt any more."

I knew the soldier spirit of my old comrade. He was loyal and patriotic. He was glad to enlist, but he thought that God had a special work to do, for which he had waited. And now he was encouraged to believe that, as we prayed, a sign of God's willingness to accept the recruit had been given. This he called the feeling

that something inside "sort o' broke." The way of duty and of faith was plain thenceforth to him.

The command "Be converted" was an improper translation in our old Bibles. The phrase is correctly rendered, in the Revision, "turn," or "turn again." Turning toward God *is* a simple duty whenever one is on the wrong track, however often he needs to turn. Theological errors of generations cannot always be removed by formal discussion with an anxious soul, but that soul may be led to see that God is now ready to take him just as he is, and that God will cause to "sort o' break" whatever inner bond had held back the willing soul.

VI

Facing "the Unpardonable Sin"

If there is one mental trouble above another that seems to call for sympathy and tenderness of treatment, it is the fear that one has committed "the unpardonable sin," and now stands facing hopelessly the eternal consequences of this wrong-doing. Nor is this fear an utterly exceptional one. Many a sensitive conscience has suffered from it for years. It is worth serious thought on the part of all those who would help souls.

Several conversations which I had with one of these troubled souls illustrates one phase of this difficulty, and a way of meeting it. A young man who was active in Christian work, and who was a confessed follower of Christ, had puzzled over the words of our Lord that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit could not be for-

given (see Matt. 12 : 31-37). Thinking over the subject persistently, he had come to fear that he had committed that sin, and he was oppressed accordingly.

"As I read the Bible," he said, "'Whosoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in that which is to come.' Now I fear that I have, at some time, spoken in that way. If I have, there is no hope for me."

"Did you do this deliberately, and with a purpose of doing it? Or did you merely do it triflingly and irreverently?"

"It is the thing itself that is spoken of by our Lord, without reference to the inner spirit of the speaker."

"Have you regretted your thoughtless and irreverent evil speech?"

"Yes, indeed I have, many and many times. But that doesn't make any difference in the case of a sin that will not be forgiven in this world or the next, in spite of our repentings."

"Does it seem like a loving God, to be watching for one slip of the tongue, or one thoughtless or irreverent word, and then to refuse to forgive that wrong, however penitent or humble the wrong-doer finally is? God sent Jesus into this world to show his love for *sinners*, and Jesus 'is able to save *to the uttermost* them that draw near unto God through him, seeing he *ever* liveth to make intercession for them' (see Heb. 7 : 25). Is your view consistent with the Bible teachings about the never-failing love of God?"

"I shouldn't think so if it were not for those words of Jesus about this *one* sin as different from all other sins. But there his words stand, and I'm fearfully troubled because of them."

"Well, now, my friend, don't you misread those words as they were spoken and as the record of them stands? When did Jesus speak those words? and to whom? and under what circumstances? They

are too important to be perverted and misused. Have a care, therefore, on that point. Read over more carefully the passage in Matthew's Gospel, and see what the words mean. Jesus was working wonders of grace. He was showing the love of the Father and the power of the Holy Spirit. He was opposing Satan and his works. Then those who opposed Jesus said that he and his disciples were representatives of Satan. At this, Jesus suggested that one who counted the Holy Spirit and Satan one and the same, was in a hopeless state; God could do nothing more for such a man. If one who sees God's work and Satan's work says that there is no difference between the two, God is powerless in that man's behalf. God has nothing better than the Holy Spirit's work to show to a man in this world or the next. My friend, can you see nothing better in the Holy Spirit's work than in the work of Satan?"

"Indeed, I can see a great deal that is

better. There is no comparison to be made between the two. One is all good; the other is all bad."

"Then you have no doubt as to where you would stand on that issue?"

"Of course I do not."

"If, therefore, the unpardonable sin is being on the side of Satan against the Holy Spirit, as the great issue in the contest, in this world or in the next, you would feel that you were on the right side and in the right state,—would you?"

"Yes, I would, as you state the case. But I have not been looking at it in that way. I have not read the words of Jesus in this way before."

"Well, that is the way that I read those words, as they were spoken according to the Bible record. I find a meaning in them consistent with the spirit of Jesus, with the general teachings of Scripture, with the peculiar circumstances of their utterance, with the lessons of sound reason, and with the very letter of the

text. On the other hand, *you* find a meaning in the words as you read them that is, as you admit, not consistent with what you have known of the love of the Father, with the spirit of Jesus, or with the known workings of the Holy Spirit. Which of these two methods is to be preferred? Tell me frankly."

"Your view, I admit, does seem the most reasonable."

"We may always be sure that a positive command or threat of God is based on a principle prevalent throughout all God's domain. It is never a mere specific offense or transgression that he refers to as cutting one off from hope, but rather an attitude of being, which would be the same in this life and beyond. Thus it is in this instance. But, tell me, did it ever trouble you to think that the sin you had committed had shut you out from God's love and presence?"

"It has caused me agony unspeakable. I have mourned over it, and prayed about

it day and night; and oh, how I have longed for help!"

"That is in itself proof that you have not committed the unpardonable sin. Jesus speaks of that sin as putting its doer in a hopelessly hostile attitude toward God. If you had committed that sin, or were in that attitude of being, you would not want to be forgiven or loved of God. No, no, my friend, you have sins enough that *can* be forgiven, which you ought to think about and strive to overcome, without worrying over the unpardonable sin which you do not comprehend, and which you evidently have not committed."

And that long-troubled soul was led into the light, and found peace and rest in the assured love of God. May every soul similarly perplexed have like rest and peace!

He had been worrying over a sin which he had not committed; but which if he had committed, he would have ceased to worry about. So, in fact, his very worrying

was proof that he had no cause for worry. How Satan gives trouble to those who are his determined enemies, leaving alone those of whom he is already sure!

SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

VII

Waiting for More Faith

That faith is essential to spiritual life, no one can doubt who reads intelligently the Old Testament or the New. Abraham had faith, and that faith was reckoned to him for righteousness,—for a right state before God. Inspired prophets tell us that the just, the righteous, are to live by their faith, by their restful trust in God. Hardly any single injunction is more frequently expressed by the Saviour of men, to those who desire his help, than the command to "have faith in God." It is their faith that Jesus insists on. It is on their faith that his help depends. It is by means of their faith that they are saved. So clearly and positively is this truth expressed in the Bible that those who would be guided by the precepts of that Book are ever ready to give prominence to the duty of faith as their ground of hope.

Yet a clear idea of what faith is, and of what it is to have faith, is anything but common among Bible readers and seekers of peace and rest. Of course, systematic theology has done much to mislead and confuse those who would know and have right ideas of God's teachings. Thus theologians have told us that there are different kinds of faith,—that there is intellectual faith, and formal faith, and lifeless faith, and, again, that there is saving faith. This leads the anxious to wonder what are the distinctive characteristics of that kind of faith of which prophet and apostle had so much to say, and on which Jesus seemed to pivot his power to help life-seekers.

Faith is not a possession or attainment, the having of which enables a man to be strong, and to have knowledge, and to work wonders in his sphere. Faith is an attitude of being toward God, a condition of mind and spirit that makes one ready to accept as sure what God has promised, and what God has said he will do. President

Mark Hopkins once said simply and wisely: "There is no conflict between faith and reason. Faith is the believing that God will do as he has promised. That certainly is not unreasonable." Again, good Dr. Bushnell said: "Faith is not a mysterious possession, it is a simple act. Faith is that act by which one person, a sinner, commits himself to another person, a Saviour."

It is indeed strange that so many perplexed doubters have worried for years over the question whether they had enough faith, or whether the faith they had was of the right sort. While faith, true faith, is so reasonable and so simple, one who has for years had much to do with perplexed doubters has no hesitation in saying that no other cause of doubt has been so common or so persistent, among those who have sought his help, as the lack, or the quality, or the relative measure, of faith. About the necessity of faith most are agreed. About the possession of faith there is much doubt.

One who had been for years an active member of a prominent church, and who was at that very time a Sunday-school teacher, came to me as one who, as he thought, gave evidence of faith, while he bemoaned his own lack of it. To me he said longingly:

"I wish I had your faith, my friend."

"What do you want of my faith?" was the reply. "You'd better have your own faith. You've nothing more to do with my faith than with my pocket-book. Let every man have his own faith."

"Then I'll say I wish I had more faith, —more faith of my own."

"You have got more faith now than you are willing to use. What would you do with any more? If you've faith as big as a grain of mustard-seed, and will use it aright, you can uproot big trees and mighty mountains, and do other great things. Your difficulty is not in being without enough faith, but in being unwilling to use what faith you have. If you

believe one thing that Jesus promises you, and are ready to do accordingly, you are using a little of your faith. Then you are ready to have and to use more faith. Having faith is of no use except as you use it."

Encouraged to take this view of faith and of truth, this doubter came to exercise faith, and his faith grew accordingly. Finally his faith actually evidenced itself to the ends of the earth,—while he was an active foreign missionary,—and he rejoiced in his faith, or in the Saviour on whom it rested, and others were thereby benefited.

For years a seeker after truth and light suffered in doubt because she thought she had not faith enough, or that the faith she had was not of the right sort. She was constant in prayer and longing. She was ready to do every duty which she knew. She studied the Bible for counsel and comfort. She got help at many points, but at other points she was met by the injunction that even in seeking help from God she must ask in unwavering faith, and that re-

quirement seemed a barrier to her. In telling of her troubles to one of whom she sought counsel, she stated the case in this way:

"When I found the invitation in James 1 : 5, I thought I was helped: 'If any of you lacketh wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.' That was encouraging. The next verses, however, staggered me: 'But let him ask in faith, nothing doubting: for he that doubteth is like the surge of the sea driven by the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord; a doubleminded man, unstable in all his ways.' I'm afraid I'm a double-minded person. My faith sometimes wavers. I wish I could have a faith where there'd never be a doubt."

"Do you mean that you sometimes think that Christ is to be trusted, and at other times you do not think that he is to be depended on?" That was the question

put to the doubter by the one whose counsel she sought.

"No, I never have any doubt about Christ. I'm only speaking about my faith in Christ. I don't always have the same feeling of faith in Christ."

"Then it is not a matter of your faith, but of your personal feeling, that troubles you. Your faith depends on what Christ is, and what you understand him to be. Your feeling on the subject may depend on any one of a dozen things. Sometimes a walk in the fresh air will change your feelings. Sometimes a little soda-mint or spirits of ammonia will set things straight inside."

And she was thus shown to be another of the many who are needlessly in doubt because they confound their feelings about faith with faith itself. Faith is indeed important, but one's feelings about faith are of no importance.

Another doubter about his faith I visited at a time when the doubter was in bereave-

ment, and when he regretted that he could not count himself a child of God. He was a man upright in his personal life, a lover of the Bible, a constant church attendant. He was in the habit of personal prayer, but he did not think it would be right for him, without faith, to confess Christ as his Saviour. I sought to induce him to evidence faith in confessing Christ before men.

"I'd like to," he said, "but I have no faith in Christ."

"Why don't you have faith?" asked his friend.

"Because it is not in my power to have faith."

"Do you believe that Christ is worthy of being loved and obeyed?"

"Yes, indeed I do."

"Then why do you not love and obey him?"

"I do love him, and I obey him in everything except when he tells me to have faith. In that one thing I am powerless."

"Let us see about that," I said. "Suppose that this very night you were to know there was to be a struggle between the friends and the enemies of Jesus, and you were told that those who wanted to be true to him must line up on the other side of the street, while those who were against Jesus, or who were in doubt about their position, could stay where they were; what would you do?"

"I'd go over on the other side of the street, where his supporters lined up."

"Would you do this if it would cost you your life, and when you might risk your soul?"

"Of course I would," he said.

"That is what Jesus counts faith," said his friend, "and standing up to confess Christ before men is lining up with his followers on his side of the way."

And on the next occasion when new members were received into our home church, I rejoiced to see the long-time doubter stand up in line with those who

were ready to declare their trust in Christ as their Saviour. How many there are who have doubt about their faith when they have no doubt about their Saviour, and who are ready to show this, at any risk, in a testing time!

VIII

Troubled Because Enjoying God's Service

It may seem strange, but it is nevertheless undeniable, that many Christians have been troubled because they were finding enjoyment in God's service. They have, in fact, been disturbed because they were not disturbed; were unhappy, because they were happy. And, after all, this is by no means to be wondered at, with human nature as it is, and with God's grace working as it does. But it is an important aspect of truth to be considered by one who would give help to doubters.

It is true that it is easier to slip down than to clamber up; more inviting to enter the broad and thronged road to death than to walk in the less-trod narrow path that leads to life. But one who continues to toil upward may after a while find enjoyment in

surmounting obstacles and breathing the purer air of the loftier regions. And as the years go on there is more true enjoyment in the strait and narrow way of life than in the broad and easy road of death. These things are not, however, always borne in mind by one who looks at a single side of the case.

Probably the difficulty was more common in former days than in these; but there are still manifestations of it among believers. It is back of the idea of penance and self-mortification. Many a man has thought he had a better prospect of wearing a white robe in the next life if he wore a haircloth shirt in this. Scourging the body with whips has often been undertaken as a help to saving the soul. This has been practiced not only among heathen and idolaters, but among followers of the Lord Jesus Christ in the later as well as the earlier centuries.

Within my memory it was a prevalent idea that there was a superior sanctity in

a long face and a gloomy expression of countenance. Cheerfulness in looks or in voice was supposed to be at variance with true religious devotion. If one would rightly observe the Sabbath, he must avoid giving positive evidence of enjoyment or happiness between sundown on Saturday evening and sundown on Sunday evening.

So far did this idea extend that many an earnest Christian actually believed that true enjoyment was inconsistent with a right performance of religious duty. Not only must a man do right whether he found it easy or difficult, pleasant or disagreeable; but to find duty-doing easy and pleasant was an indication of a wrong spirit, if, indeed, it did not show that he had mistaken the path of duty.

As a practical consequence of this way of looking at duty, many felt that to find pleasure in God's service was to throw suspicion on the acts of service which could cause pleasure rather than pain. Of two lines of effort, one attractive and the other

repellent, the repellent one was thought to be more likely than the other to be right, because the human heart inclines to evil rather than to good. It may seem strange that any intelligent believer could have reasoned in this way; but that many have thus reasoned cannot be denied. Hence in this case, as in many another, it is the duty of one who would give help to the doubter to perceive in what he is most unreasonable, and to enable him to see its unreasonable side.

I knew of one instance of this sort which is illustrative of many others. A prominent Christian worker had begun very early in life to walk in the narrow path, and to clamber toward the spiritual heights. His time, all his powers, and his every worldly possession, he counted as a trust committed to his charge, to be used in God's service. As the years went on he came to find most enjoyment in doing what he felt God would have him do. Nothing else was to be compared with this, in his

estimation. And this began to trouble him. It was so at variance with much that he heard from the pulpit and in the prayer-meeting of his day, and that he read in the current religious literature, that he questioned himself as to the possibility of his being on the wrong track in life. As to the fact that he really enjoyed life in his present course he could have no question. Where was the cause of trouble? Coming to me, whom he knew intimately, he stated the case somewhat in this way:

"For years I have been in the habit of giving systematically a regular portion of my income. As God has prospered me in business affairs, I have for some time had quite ample means to dispose of, and I have been enjoying this distribution. And now the pleasure I find in it is seriously troubling me."

"Have you been guided in your particular gifts by the enjoyment you would have, or by your sense of duty?"

"Of course I have tried to do my duty in every instance of giving."

"What has been the nature of your special gifts?"

"Besides my giving to causes presented in our home church, I have helped persons whom I knew to be in need. I have helped widows and children who required assistance. I have given or loaned money to students struggling for an education."

"Have you sought prominence by the size of your church donations?"

"On the contrary, I have tried to avoid that. If I desired to give more than usual to a cause on our church list, I would give about as much as would be expected of me in the regular church collection. Then I would send an extra sum anonymously to the society direct. In such ways I have tried to avoid prominence as a giver."

"How about the needy and worthy persons helped by you; have you given either ostentatiously or recklessly?"

"I have been as careful as possible about

that. I have avoided prominence and any show of generosity. I have taken the opportunity of quietly lending a hand, as it were, to those who needed a helping hand. In the case of young students, especially those whom I knew desired to be in the ministry, I have made a loan rather than a gift, so that the student might be more independent and self-respecting."

"Do you think that your gifts have been made for your own reputation or enjoyment, or in the line of supposed duty and at the call of God?"

"Of course I have given in each case as I thought was in the line of duty, and where God would have me give. But I am finding such enjoyment in thus giving that it disturbs me. Where does the self-denial come in? We are told to deny ourselves."

"We have no right to give in order to gratify self, or in order to secure selfish enjoyment. But do you think there is any merit in personal discomfort, or in doing

what we shrink from, or what we are reluctant to do?"

"I confess that I have felt that the best doing, and that reluctant doing, were likely to go together, if, indeed, they were not identical."

"If that is the way you look at it, and there is any reason, or true ground, for your feeling as you do, I think I can suggest a cure for you, or can propose a plan that will avoid your present trouble. Suppose you try this method.

"When next you learn of a worthy poor widow with children, whom you might be inclined to help, just quietly refrain from giving her of your means, and let her and her little ones suffer. And when you know of some struggling students who have hard work to get on unaided, resolutely abstain from doing as you have done hitherto, and see that they have no help from you."

"Oh, I couldn't do that!"

"But wouldn't it be harder and more discomforting than if you gave?"

"Of course it would."

"Well, there is where the self-denial would come in, if the measure of discomfort is the true test of right."

"I don't really know that it is."

"Well, I don't even *think* that it is. No, my friend, my idea is, that you'd better do as God would have you do, whether you like it or not, whether it is agreeable or disagreeable. Why should you be troubled while bearing Christ's yoke and burden in his service, even if it proves, as he promises, that his yoke is easy and his burden is light?"

"I don't suppose I should, as I now see the matter."

And from seeing the matter in a new light, that child of God lived for the rest of his life having enjoyment, instead of trouble and worry, in giving help to others as God enabled him.

IX

Considering Our Desires, instead of God's Love

It is so much easier for us to feel the force of what we wish in the light of our present conditions and surroundings, than it is for us to comprehend what God wills in the light of His infinite knowledge and boundless love. And it is natural for those in the close limitations of humanity to be correspondingly unreasonable. Most persons are readier to judge God for his acts as affecting their supposed interests than to be judged by God for their actions as related to his disclosed purposes for their true welfare.

I was hardly more than a boy when this truth was first strongly impressed on me by the course and words of a young father whom I knew. The young man's wife was a lovely Christian woman; but he had never

committed himself trustfully to God's guidance. While reverent toward God in all his outward acts, his position was rather that of an outside observer of God and God's children than of one who desired to be one with them. When his first child was born he was very happy. When that child was taken sick he was very anxious. Everything that medical skill and nursing could do for the child's recovery was secured. The father was even glad to have the wife's pastor called in to pray for the sick child's recovery. But when, after all, the child was taken away by death, the grief of the father was extreme; and there was bitterness in that grief.

The father was now childless,—and this by the act of God. Instead of being in any sense submissive, the bereaved father seemed actually angry at God. He did not hesitate to say that it would have been a small matter to God to spare that child, and he had been asked to do so, and had refused to grant the request. The loss of

that child was a great thing to the father, and God knew it would be so. And now the father's feelings were well known to God, and God could not expect to have the bereaved father's support or approval thenceforward while that father lived.

This determined attitude toward, or against, God, greatly shocked my young mind, as it was the first revelation to me of such a state of mind in view of God's providential dealings with the children of men. Yet afterwards I found that this instance was by no means an isolated case. Again and again, as I came to be more among men, I found this attitude of the human mind existing; and I sought to deal with it as it was, instead of wondering why it was so.

One afternoon I was asked, under peculiar circumstances, to call on a young mother who was ill and in trouble. I was not acquainted with her, and I was told that she did not wish to see me; yet the circumstances as told me were such

SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

that I felt it to be my duty to go with her husband, as he told her story and made the request for the visit. She had a bright young son, who was for some years her only child. She had wished he had been a daughter. When, after some years, a little daughter was born to her, she was full of happiness and hope. But in a few weeks the babe sickened and died. Then she was inconsolable. Neither husband nor son could give her comfort. She had no peace or rest in a Saviour's love. It was under these circumstances that I had been asked to visit her, and that I responded to the call.

She was unable to rise from her bed, and as I, the caller, sat by her bedside, I realized that I was unwelcome. Knowing her husband and boy, I spoke of them, and then said that I was sincerely sorry to learn of her great loss. I told of my own sorrow when a prisoner of war in a South Carolina jail, and the first letter that came to me through the lines by flag of

truce told of the death of my youngest daughter. I couldn't go to the sorrowing mother to try to comfort her; nor could I even write to her except in a brief letter which the prison authorities must read before allowing it to pass.

"That was pretty trying, you will believe. So I know how to sympathize with you," said I.

"Yes, that was hard," said the rebellious mother. "But was she your only daughter?"

"No, I had two other daughters; but she was my loved baby daughter."

"But my baby was my only daughter, so you see my trial is greater than yours. You had your other daughters to love and care for. I have none."

"Your case is a trying one," I said. "But where do you think your dear baby is now?"

"In Heaven," she replied. Every stricken mother is glad to believe that truth, however she may lack confidence in God's love.

"Do you suppose she is happy in Heaven?"

"I don't doubt she is."

"Do you think it tends to make your dear baby happier, or gives her pain, to know that you are grieving that God has taken her to himself, and made her so happy because he loves her and loves you?"

At this question the young mother turned on her bed with a start, and, looking at me earnestly, said, "Do you suppose that my baby now knows anything about me and my feelings?"

"Why shouldn't she?" I asked. "If she is in Heaven, with all the enlarged possibilities of that state, loved of God and loving God, why shouldn't she have an interest in those whom God loves, and to whom she is bound by precious and spiritual ties?"

At once the relations of myself and the interested mother were on a different plane. She was glad to think and talk

about her little one, and its possible condition in Heaven. The more we talked the more comfort the mother found in what she still had, in love and hope, with her darling in God's presence. At the thought that her dear little girl was simply away from her for a season, having more of happiness and profit than would have been possible to her had she remained here, the temporary separation could not only be borne, but could be seen in a bright light.

When I left, the mother who had had no wish for my call asked me to come again and continue the conversation. God was seen in a new light when his love was made prominent even in the event that had seemed wholly dark before. I went to that home again and again, and the mother and the father of the little one in Heaven were glad to draw nearer to Him with whom their darling was forever in joy. Together they soon stood up in the same church fold and confessed the Saviour of their little

one as their Saviour. How much difference it makes when we look at God's providence in the light of his boundless love, instead of in the light of our poorly informed personal desires!

The mistake which that bereaved mother made in thinking of her baby daughter who had been taken from her when she longed to have her grow up in her earthly home, is made by many another person who prefers to look at every trying providence in the light of one's personal wishes, instead of in the light of God's boundless and all-seeing love. How common it is to want to have God consider us as the center around which the universe revolves, instead of our thinking of God as the center whose love and dealings we should look to as indicating our duty and privileges! Ourselves first, God as conforming to our wishes; that is the way we would have things.

A Christian woman, who was active and useful in Christ's service, had a loved

home where were a godly father and a saintly mother. The years passed on, and precious memories accumulated in that home. The present was so delightful, and the past was so sacred, that there seemed no place for thought of, or longings for, anything better, or even anything as good, yet to come. Continuance, not change, was desired. But in ripe old age father and mother passed out of that home into endless rest. The devoted daughter in maturity of years was called to a new life for which she had not made full preparation. She missed those to whose companionship she had been accustomed all her life long. This change was a shock to her that seemed to break her down, and to destroy her faith and her present enjoyment.

It mattered not in this case that the event was one which should have been looked for in the ordinary course of nature. Reason as well as faith is likely to be lost sight of by one who is inclined to complain

of God and God's dealings. Self was the center of thought in this case as in many another. No way of looking at it seemed to lessen the trial of one who would have God plan and perform for the personal ease and enjoyment of the complainer. Contentment was out of the question; even resignation or submission had no place in mind or heart. The stricken one ceased to pray. Intercourse seemed to be cut off with God, since he had ceased to shape his doings according to her personal longings.

As I had long known this home and all its inmates, I earnestly sought to give sympathy and help in this time of need. But as I talked I found that the main thought then was of the home life interrupted, when God knew that the desire was to have it continued. Then I sought to turn the thought to the new happiness of the parents, taken from all the trials and toils of earth, and of our reason for thankfulness that they were such gainers, although we had some trials in con-

nection with this providence. Thus another phase of persistent doubting showed itself. This was suggestive.

"Do you doubt that your parents are happier now than they could be here?" I asked.

"No, I do not; but they would have remained here longer if the choice had been given them, and they knew it would make me unhappy to live without them."

"If they look down on you now in your complaining spirit, do you suppose that they would be glad, or sorry, that you feel as you do?"

"I know they would be sorry."

"Ought you to be willing to make them sorry? or ought you to do what you can to increase their joy?"

"They understand me well enough to know that I couldn't feel otherwise."

Seeing this persistent way of looking at the one side of the case, and knowing of the complaining, rebellious, and prayerless course of the mourner, I held up another thought to be considered.

"If God were to take you from this life, wouldn't you like to join your parents in God's presence, and be with them evermore?"

"Of course I would."

"Are you in a state to do so now?"

"I know they'd be glad to welcome me."

"Yes; but *they* do not open or close the doors of Heaven to any soul. That is God's work. Are you not now opposing God, complaining of God, defying God? Why should God take you where your parents are, when you feel toward God as you say you do?"

That was a new thought to the complaining doubter. Thinking of it a few minutes she inquired:

"How can I feel differently?"

"Admit that God has been doing the best he could do, even if he has done differently from what you would have preferred or advised. Remember that God has some rights as well as some power, and, if you cannot pray to him gratefully,

at least go to him submissively, and tell him that you want to conform yourself to his known will, and to come into a state that will fit you to be like your parents as you knew them while they were here, and as he knows them where they now are.

"Such a course, you may be sure, would be approved by your parents, whom you say you do love, and by God, whom they love, and whom you ought to love more than you do. Any other course is antagonism to your father and mother, and to their and your God."

After talking this view of the case over, it was admitted that it was a proper view. And when once the thoughts were turned from self as the center to God as the only true center, it was a simple matter to learn that light is better than darkness, love is better than discord, right is better than wrong; and that what we ought to do is better than what we are sometimes tempted to do.

X

Is Lack of Right Feeling a Barrier to Right Action?

Men who know their duty, and who fail to do it, often console themselves with the idea that they will at least not claim to be on the right side when they are not there in reality. They think that right *feeling* is more important than right *action*, and if they do not have the first, it is only an added evil for them to attempt the second. They make the great mistake of supposing that hypocrisy is somehow worse than bare-faced, defiant villainy; that, unless one really is in all things on the right side, it is wrong for him to express any sympathy with those who are there.

It is a man's duty to show approval of, and sympathy with, the right, even if he be not ready to act always on that side. The other view of the case is, indeed, the mistake

of many a person who has been led astray in his conduct, while his inner life and heart impulses are in the direction of the right.

A young man who had been well trained at home, and who had enjoyed himself in Christian life and its activities, was for a time in "border life," under evil influences in a community of reckless wrong-doers. He yielded to his surroundings, and went sadly astray. Then he was again in the society of Christian people, where religious life was prominent and, in a sense, popular. The young man was naturally drawn towards this better life, so like that in which he had been brought up and in which he knew he should be happier. Yet he said to himself, when he saw the church-goers leaving their homes and going to the house of prayer, and was inclined to join them:

"No; I know I've gone sadly astray, but I'm not yet a hypocrite. If I should go to church as if I were a church-going man, it would seem as if I wanted to pass myself off as a well-doer,—which I know I am not.

I must first get myself right, so that I feel right; then it will be time enough for me to act as if I were right."

So that young man, who had been trained to both feel right and do right, deliberately postponed doing what he admitted was in the line of right-doing because he had not yet resolved to do right and feel right in all things. His clear duty to act as if he approved of right-doing was neglected, while he hoped that, sometime, he would do right. And in this he made a sad mistake.

His mistake in this one thing at this testing-time led to similar mistakes on his part in many another thing. Even when he had broken away from the evil influences which led him into more flagrant acts of wrong-doing, and sought to conform himself to the limits of well-doing in outer conduct, he still thought that it was not right to go to the communion service, or to a prayer-meeting, or to have a part in any religious gathering, while his feelings

were not as they should be. He made his personal feelings on the subject the test of his duty to begin with, rather than his consciousness of the right, in view of God's commands and his providential surroundings in the church and the community.

Then it was that I sought to show him his error in giving such prominence to feeling rather than conduct in his course of life. As I talked with him on this subject, I asked the young man:

"Did you never feel very angry with somebody who had wronged you — so angry that, at the time, you were inclined to injure your opponent by harming him or by destroying his property?"

"Oh, I have felt so at times!"

"What was the right course for you to pursue—to do what you knew to be right, or to do what you felt at the time like doing?"

"Of course, I ought to have done right, however I felt."

"Then your feelings were not a safe guide for your action at such time?"

"Certainly not my feelings for the time."

"*All* feelings are for the time. Feelings, which are liable to change, are one thing. Convictions, which are not fleeting and temporary, are another thing."

At another time I asked the young man:

"Suppose you were started up from a sound sleep in the middle of the night by a consciousness of a fire in the house, that was liable to destroy the building or to cost precious lives, what would be your first feeling?"

"I might be tempted to go to sleep again, or not to heed the first call, for I'm a sound sleeper."

"Which course would be the right one for you to pursue—ought you to yield to your feelings, or to go against them at the cost of comfort or personal safety?"

"I ought to get up, of course, whether I felt like it or not."

"I knew you would *think* so, and in the end you would *feel* so."

And so in other illustrations:

"In case of a public election, what ought to be your guide of duty,—your personal feelings on the subject, or your consciousness of the way the result would affect the community?"

"I ought to act in view of the consequences to others."

"If a church meeting were to be held for the calling of a pastor, or for the taking of action on a new mission about to be started, and you had a vote, ought you to exercise your right of voting, even though you had been shrinking from seeming to assume a right Christian spirit?"

"Claiming a legal right to vote, even in the church, is different from claiming to have a proper spirit when going to the communion table, or attending a prayer-meeting."

"Feeling right is your duty; but acting right is also your duty. If you cannot do both, you should do that which you can do. In the long run you are more likely to feel right by doing right, whether you

like it or not, than by neglecting your known duty until you may feel like doing it."

"I think you are right about that. I know that when I kept away from church, out on the border, I used to feel that I was losing ground as I saw the people going by me to the church while I was waiting to feel right. I was losing in right feeling all the time. I am glad to have had this talk on the subject. I think it would be better to *do* one's duty, however one feels about it."

Feeling right is a duty, and it ought to be attended to. But doing right is also a duty, and it has a constant claim on one, even if for the time the feelings and impulses run in the other direction. A man ought to feel kindly toward those whom he meets and with whom he speaks. But, if he cannot feel kindly, he ought at least to look and speak kindly without reference to his feelings. A man who fails to act on this principle makes a sad mistake.

XI

Troubled Because Finding No Enjoyment in Prayer

An active, earnest, devoted Christian worker was disturbed because she did not always find enjoyment in prayer. She did not intermit nor neglect prayer; hence her state of feeling, or of her lack of feeling, was not a result of her failure to be regular and faithful in her attention to this duty. But when the hour for prayer came she did not always heartily welcome it, nor regularly and really enjoy its privileges. This was a cause of grief to her, and she sincerely sought to find the reason for this, and to learn what it indicated. She asked herself, "Is this a proof of my spiritual decline? Ought I not to be at all times in such an attitude of spirit that it would be, not only my duty and privilege, but an occasion of conscious enjoyment to me, to go to my

Father and tell him of my needs and desires, and confidently to ask his sympathy and help? Would not this be the case if I realized my duties and necessities as they are, and my Father's love as it is?"

In her perplexity of mind over this matter, the disciple came with her trouble to me for judgment and counsel, and, stating the case to me, she asked me to tell her frankly if the lack was in her spiritual condition, and, if so, how it was to be remedied. I, knowing her earnestness of Christian character, and seeing her trouble as it was, said to her:

"According to your own statement of the case, your trouble is a physical one. You say you do not have enough of physical feeling about the matter, although you have not changed your opinions about your duty or privilege. The lack you lament is a lack of physical emotion or sensitiveness."

"No, it is not a lack of physical sensibility that I lament; it is spiritual sensi-

tiveness that I should have in this matter. Prayer is a spiritual exercise."

"Yes, but you are still in the body, and fatigue, exhaustion, and other conditions of the body, affect the spirit within the body. Being faithful and persistent in prayer is one thing, having enjoyment in that exercise is another thing. One shows the spiritual state, the other shows the physical condition. When Jesus was in Gethsemane, he asked his chosen disciples to watch with him while he prayed. But they fell asleep, and that more than once. Yet Jesus did not count John as lacking in love for him. He saw that what might seem to be a lowered spiritual tone was really an exhausted physical condition, and he said, 'The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.' While we are in the flesh, the conditions of the spirit are affected by the conditions and surroundings of the flesh. Yet the spirit is lovingly considered by Him who knows us as we are. He sees it as it is rather than as it seems. And we must

try to look at ourselves according to the same standard."

The one whose mind was troubled because of her lack of enjoyment in prayer seemed to gain from this view of the case. As other believers have been similarly troubled, there may be a gain through its further considering.

Enjoyment, or a sense of enjoyment, is largely dependent on one's physical condition. We cannot have a sense, or a consciousness, of positive enjoyment while in excruciating pain, nor while in utter exhaustion, and unable to frame words or to think consecutively. Yet even at such times one's spirit can be just as truly faithful and devoted and loving as at any other time. One may be in spirit at such times as truly a good father or mother, or as loving a brother or sister or child, or as devoted a friend, or as self-sacrificing a patriot, or as consecrated a missionary, as while thrilling in every nerve with keenest enjoyment of the sacred privileges of the relation in which

he or she is honored. The spirit of the relation is one thing, the sense or conscious feeling of enjoyment in that relation is quite another thing.

This applies to all spheres and practices in human life. Even in the primal and fundamental necessity of, and desire for, food and drink, it is much as it is in the higher and more ethereal cravings of our nature,—as for human affection and for human approval. So soon as a child comes to life, it comes to a craving for nourishment. It must have nourishment because it lives, and if it would continue to live. An enjoyment in having this craving met is as natural to a normal child as is the craving itself. And so on as one grows from childhood to maturity. But it is often the case that one comes to lack the conscious desire for food, or the conscious enjoyment in the meeting or satisfying of this desire. Yet this lack of conscious desire or of enjoyment is wholly physical, and in no sense spiritual. While I was in full health and

vigor, I had, long years ago, through my army experience, and by my prolonged travel in desert and woods, come to do without a craving for food at regular times. In consequence, I could go all day without a sense of special desire for food. Yet I had the need of, apart from the desire for, nourishment. I would grow steadily weak from my lack, even while my long training had overcome my sense of desire for food at regular intervals. I could, in fact, starve to death without being hungry. Yet I was watchful of my needs and duty, and I took nourishment regularly at specified times. My lack of desire was a physical lack; but my having a care to take needful food regularly, and my gratitude for this privilege, evidenced so far my good spiritual condition.

So, again, a loving Christian worker whom I knew, whose whole time was given to Christ, was by disease incapacitated from enjoyment in partaking of food. Each day his taking of the needful supply was a season of intense pain. He shrank from it; he suf-

fered during it; it was to him only an occasion of unnatural effort. Yet he persevered through all, and this that he might have a little more physical strength for added spiritual work for his Master and for his dear ones. Rarely have I known one who showed such high spiritual devotion, in taking needful physical food without any resultant or incidental enjoyment in connection with it, as this noble sufferer. And he was but an illustration of the complete separation of duty-doing as a spiritual exercise, and of physical enjoyment in connection with that exercise.

Similarly in the matter of taking needful physical exercise in the open air. A willingness to perform the duty is one thing, finding enjoyment in that duty is another thing. The two things should not be confounded. A man who in his normal condition was peculiarly active, and seemed to enjoy exercise, had been so weakened by an extended illness that in his convalescence he found most pleasure in indoor

occupations. His physician then directed him to take exercise out of doors.

"But, doctor, I have no desire to go out," said the patient. "My enjoyment is found in my room. I have lost my old pleasure in being in the open air."

"It is not a question as to what you enjoy or desire," said the wise physician; "I want you to go out because I think it is best for you. You should make the effort for your own good, even if it is an unpleasant effort to you."

And that case is an illustration of many cases in life as life is. The doing of duty is one thing, finding enjoyment while doing one's duty is quite another thing. Doing as duty what one cannot find enjoyment in doing is often a test of manhood, and is sometimes an evidence of sainthood. In one's school studies, and in one's maturest exercise of high scholarship, it is often necessary to pore over books that one can find no enjoyment in. Much of our social intercourse has to be with persons in whom

we can find no enjoyment. Indeed, it is oftener our duty to do that which we do not find pleasure in than that which is in itself to our liking. This being the case, our true attitude of spirit is better shown by our perseverance in duty-doing while we lack enjoyment or a sense of pleasure in a given occupation, than in our doing of that in which we find the highest enjoyment.

It is true that, if we persevere in right-doing while we have no pleasure or enjoyment in it, we may come to find added enjoyment in that very occupation. But that is a result and reward of doing our duty while we found no pleasure in such doing. We should not be disturbed because we do not have the full result of our best duty-doing at the beginning, or all the way along in our progress.

XII

Unable to Believe in Miracles

As a general thing, a man who says he does not believe in miracles has no well defined idea of what he is talking about. He does not know just what he does believe, or just what he does not believe, in that sphere. Ordinarily he is simply expressing an inclination to doubt something that he does not understand, without having fixed in his own mind the limits of the belief or of the unbelief he is talking about. Many a Bible reader of to-day seems to be as poorly informed in this matter as Bishop Colenso or as Ernest Renan, both of whom, in their books of unbelief, made blunders in referring to the claims and statements of the Bible text that would be unworthy of the average pupil in the junior department of a well-conducted Sunday-school. To say that one does not believe in miracles is

to suggest that the doubter lacks an understanding of himself, and of what he is talking about.

One of these doubters said to me as a probable believer:

"I value the Bible for the truths it teaches, and for its wise counsel as to important duties. But I am free to say that I do not believe in the Bible stories of miracles. I count those as Oriental fictions, not to be taken as reasonable fact."

"Do you refer to any particular narration in the Bible as incredible, or are you making a general statement?"

"I mean that I do not believe in such a thing as a miracle. I believe that all things are within the course of the known laws of nature. Any event claimed as outside of the laws of nature is not to be accepted as true. I cannot believe it."

"Then you do not believe in any future state—any continued existence after this life?"

"Yes, I do believe in that as probable,

although yet unproved. But that is in another realm than this. In another life the laws of nature as we now understand them may not limit all possibilities."

"Then you are willing to admit that there may be in the universe possibilities beyond what we now call the laws of nature? But you are confident that God never permitted any child of his, whether Moses, or Joshua, or Elisha, or even Jesus, to exert any power in God's service except within the limits of nature's forces as we perceive them. Is that what I understand to be your claim?"

"In a sense, that is what I believe."

"Is it not possible that some of God's servants of old were familiar with, or were directed to act in accordance with, the workings of natural forces, in ways that seemed wonderful or more than natural to observers of then, yet which are well understood to-day in the light of modern research and of scientific discoveries? For example, the crossing of the Red Sea by

the Israelites; the overthrow of the walls of Jericho by the marching host; the going forward or backward of the shadow on the dial in the days of Hezekiah—as explained by Professor R. A. Proctor; and various other Bible wonders."

"Of course, I am ready to admit that any event called a miracle in the Bible that is shown in the light of modern discovery to have been within the scope of the laws of nature can be accepted as true. But those are exceptional cases. What I disbelieve are the unnatural or supernatural miracles, of which there are so many in the Bible narrative."

"Yet all these miracles which are explained to us by modern science had their supernatural side or phase shown in the Divine directions or interposition given as to time or place, which unaided men could not have known about."

"I believe that God often gives to a child of his a prompting or guidance that may affect his most important interests. Yet

EVANGELICAL SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

these are always in the line of the laws or forces of nature."

"Yes, the Bible miracles differ from other Oriental wonders in that the latter are unnatural, while the former are simply supernatural,—directed from above nature. It is in this that the Bible miracles are wholly unlike such stories as those in the Arabian Nights and other Oriental works. The Bible miracles are never unnatural, or anti-natural, while they evidence a supernatural power,—a power above nature."

"But I do not think that there is any place for a special 'miracle' in our present sphere, when God's ordinary laws are operative under his control, and in accordance with his plans."

"Are you sure you know what you mean when you say 'miracle'? At least three different Hebrew and two Greek words are in the common version of the Bible translated 'miracle.' These words mean severally 'a wonder,' 'something wonderful,' 'an act of power,' 'a sign.' Do you

deny or doubt that Moses or Joshua or Elijah, or that Jesus, in some cases performed wonders, or did acts of power, or wrought what were signs or tokens of their representative character or mission?"

"Of course I do not. I have never doubted that."

"Then you do not mean that you deny or doubt all 'miracles' in the strictest meaning of the words thus translated in the Bible?"

"I admit that there is an ambiguity as to the meaning of the word 'miracle,' as ordinarily used."

"Yes, it is evident that you, like a great many other doubters, including Bishop Colenso and Ernest Renan, and even men who are called scholars and thinkers, and who would not want to be called culpably careless or ignorant as writers or speakers, have used pivotal words with reference to important truths that do not mean, or even fairly indicate, your views or position as to Bible truth."

"But I used the English word 'miracle,' and I intended it to be understood in the sense in which that word is commonly, or popularly, used. I do not believe in miracles in the sense of something not to be accounted for in the ordinary or established workings of the course of nature, and claimed to be wrought by the direct exercise or intervention of divine power. Such miracles I cannot believe in, even if they are recorded in the Bible."

"Yet you have said that events recorded in the Bible, which seemed at the time to be miraculous, and which in the light of then you could not have believed, have, in the progress of human knowledge, been shown to be wholly credible. That you still admit."

"Of course I do. I deny the claim of events that are not to be accounted for except by a direct interposition of divine power, and that obviously are not within the established order of nature. Those I cannot accept."

"If it had been said a few years ago that one man had communicated with another at a distance on or over the ocean without a connecting wire or cable, would that have been counted a miracle?"

"With our knowledge of then, we should have been likely to say that it was claiming miraculous power, and the fact might have been doubted by one who had not positive evidence of it."

"But in our day one has no hesitation in believing it."

"Of course not."

"Is your claim, then, that your belief as to miracles is contingent on your measure of personal knowledge, or on evidence that is satisfactory to yourself, with an explanation that will convince you as to the forces of nature newly brought in play? In other words, that your measure of belief in the miraculous is a sliding scale, which depends on your growing progress in material knowledge? Must you be prepared by intellectual attainments for any fresh

disclosure of God's goodness or power before you can accept as true what is claimed by others as a result of science or as an act of God's love and power?"

"I am glad to believe that I am constantly making progress in knowledge and faith. I see, in these days, the *reasonableness* of many things that our fathers spoke of as *miraculous*."

"You admit, then, that your doubt about miracles is more indefinite, less surely limited, than you counted it in the beginning of our conversation; that it has changed from time to time in the past; and that it is still liable to change in certain undisclosed particulars."

"Strictly speaking, that may be so as to my use of the word. But I say confidently that God's course in nature is established; that God does not interpose his special power for the benefit of one of his children in the manner suggested by the word 'miracle,' or 'miraculous.' In other words, I do not believe in special or par-

ticular providences as often claimed and pressed."

"It seems unnecessary for us to discuss this question any farther. It is pleasant to know that you believe as much as you do in God's love and power as back of all the workings of what we call the established or ordinary forces of nature. Your present doubt seems to be one of faith and its direction, rather than as to the miraculous in the sphere of human activities. As to that, we differ widely. Not wishing to discuss it, I desire to state my own belief on the subject, and to leave that before you as my testimony as to what God is to me, and what he is ready to be to whoever trusts him.

"With God there is neither great nor small. His providences, as affecting us, are both general and particular. In him we live, and move, and have our being. We are as dependent on the exercise of God's personal power for the next breath we draw as are the stars in the courses

dependent on his keeping in play the great forces of the universe. In the Bible, which tells of these "miracles" in the line of God's plans for his children, God invites us to tell him of our needs, and to trust him for their full supply. Myriads of trusting souls have turned to him in their time of need, and have had those promises more than made good to them. Of course, God employs the forces of the universe when he would answer the prayers of a child of his who in faith asks for help. But God is not limited to the self-action of those forces. God has at least as much power of direction as a telephone operator when he uses the force of electricity in sending a message to an apothecary for a vial of spirits of ammonia for a person who feels faint. God can act in particular cases as well as in sweeping generalities. He has more love and power than has a telegraph operator or an electrician.

"Personally, I will say gratefully, that, for more than half a century of experience

in the Christian life, I have lived in confidence in those specific promises, and God has never failed me. More surely than the most devoted father, the tenderest mother, the wisest physician, God has ministered to me in supplying me with specific directions, often including detailed counsel, not to be accounted for by any known law of nature,—directions including my personal actions and the course of others, affecting my life, my health, my business affairs, the interests of the community. These were not merely remarkable occurrences; they were miracles, events out of the known order, and wrought by the intervention of divine power. As to the continuance of this mode of life I have no doubt, while God continues to be God, and his children continue to need and to trust him. Does this sound 'miraculous'? I think so."

XIII

Not Believing in Any Spiritual Existence

Unbelief, or non-faith, is more or less sweeping according as a man knows too much or too little to rest on and to enjoy God's disclosure of his love and wisdom as he shows himself in the universe and as he has revealed himself in his Word. More careful thinkers draw a clear distinction between an infidel, a deist, an atheist, a materialist, and a modern science-proud "agnostic," or confessed "know-nothing" in the realm of the greatest certitudes. Ordinary unbelievers or non-believers content themselves with asserting that they do not believe much of anything, without being sure in their own minds what they are talking about, or thinking about, in the larger realm. Each sort of denier or of doubter has to be dealt with as he shows

himself, without considering him as one of a class.

Once, while a regimental chaplain, I sat in a field hospital, talking with a couple of wounded officers. Sitting on the edge of the next cot to them was another wounded officer, talking with a friend. As his back was turned to me, he did not know that his words were being heard by me. Speaking of the dangers of battle, he said confidently:

"I can't die but once, and when I die that's the end of me. All this talk about a life after death is sheer nonsense. There's nothing of me but what you see here. The idea of a spirit existence is absurd."

The two young officers with whom I was talking, hearing this remark, looked at each other and at me, as if wondering what I would say. I simply shook my head sadly, and said as if I meant it:

"The captain says there's no more to him when he dies than there is to a used-up mule or a dead hog. He ought to

know himself better than we do. I don't know where we could begin an argument to show he is mistaken. You and I know that there's something more than that to us; and we thank God that there is."

The argument of the instinctive self-consciousness of an immortal spirit showed itself in the recoil of those officers from the thought of the captain's gross materialism. They fairly shuddered with disgust. One of them exclaimed:

"What a thought that is!"

The other responded:

"If the captain should hear that, I think he'd be ashamed that he ever said what he did."

And the way was thus opened for an earnest talk between myself and the two officers on the truth which their own inner consciousness made evident, that a man's spirit, as apart from his body and mind, distinguishes him from the brute creation more than does the outer form.

A man who was exceptionally intelli-

gent and thoughtful, a university graduate, said honestly that he could find no evidence of the existence of God. He would be glad to be convinced to the contrary, but all his reading and searching were of no avail. He was asked:

"Are not the evidences of God's existence to be seen on every side in the universe? Is not our very confidence in the courses of nature, in the changes of the seasons, in the laws of growth and decay, and in all that we have, or can have, or can hope for, an evidence and a proof that all is ordered and controlled by a Supreme Intelligence or Almighty God?"

"Oh! I believe that we are affected by, and are subject to, the courses and the laws of nature. No intelligent person can doubt that."

"How can you have any confidence that the same system will prevail in nature year by year and age by age, unless you believe that an Intelligent and Omnipotent God is over all? John Stuart Mill, who began

his studies as an atheist, admitted that the very term 'laws of nature' presupposes a God over nature. There can be no law without a lawgiver. Both making and enforcing laws require knowledge and power—or Almighty God."

"That is an anthropomorphic idea. You seem to think that the controlling force or forces in the universe must be a person or an individual, like a mammoth man which you call God, but which I speak of impersonally as Nature. That is the difference between us."

"Then you do not see any signs or evidence of a Supreme Person or God in the universe, who is over all, and who has an interest in all existing creatures? You see no proof of this?"

"I do not. I should be glad if I could, but I do not."

"Does not this show you to be exceptional? Are you, in this, exceptionally strong, or exceptionally weak? Is it because you are above, or below, others in your spiritual perceptions?"

"I certainly do not claim that it is a proof of my superiority; yet I do not think that it is, in itself, an evidence of my mental lack. I know that some of the world's superior thinkers, and men of unquestioned ability and character, have been unable to perceive proofs of the existence of a God. I simply confess that I am of this number. I do not perceive the proofs of the existence of God, while I would be glad to be thus convinced."

"As something to aid you in deciding whether your failure to perceive evidences of God in nature and above nature is a sign of your progress or of your backwardness, have you considered whether the world, in its advances, is toward fuller faith or freer doubt?"

"I suppose that as the world progresses men are less likely to accept without good reason many of the beliefs of their ancestors as to the unseen and unknown world? In view of that truth, I suppose it would hardly be claimed that it shows a

lack of intelligence to wait for evidence of the existence of spiritual beings in another sphere, and of an Almighty God above all."

"Is not the belief in a spiritual being, or in spiritual beings, which are above and beyond sight and sense, as general in our race as the belief in those things that are disclosed to us by our senses?"

"I would hardly admit that. While mankind generally inclines to the idea that there are spirits unseen to be placated or invoked, there have always been those among the more intelligent of our race who would not admit that the fancies of superstition, or the proposal to solve in a certain way the mysteries of the unseen and unknown spheres, were to be accepted as satisfactory."

"Similarly there have always been individuals who were lacking in more or less of the five senses which we deem essential to highest efficiency in our natural life. But even though one like Helen Keller gives proof of high capabilities while deaf and

blind, this hardly proves that those persons are mistaken who have and use their eyes and ears.

"Look at the record of our race in the matter of recognizing the existence and personality of an Almighty God. There has never been a people in any age, or in any land, so advanced, or reaching so superior a plane in intellect and learning, as not to have had its best and wisest men such believers. Thus with Egypt in its glory, with Babylon in its pride, with Greece in its palmiest days; with Rome, and Arabia, and India, and with other of the mightier peoples of earth. So it has been with peoples of the least civilization and culture. No people has been found so low, or so lacking, as to be without a prevailing belief in God or gods. So we can say that this belief is as widespread among men as is the use of the five senses."

"But has not non-belief, or doubt, or agnosticism, among those of the highest

intelligence, including some of the foremost thinkers and students in the world, increased, in these later years, with the progress of the race?"

"Such superior persons as you speak of who are doubters, or agnostics, are still as exceptional as the deaf and blind Helen Kellers of our day. Over against them are those of firm belief and of reverent faith, the equals of, if not superiors to, and in numbers far exceeding, the doubters and agnostics. At the close of the nineteenth century a larger proportion of the scholars and thinkers and wise men of the world than at the close of any former century in history were firm believers in Almighty God, and were rejoicing in their belief. These men, who now include eminent scholars, great thinkers, foremost scientists, are men influential among their fellows. Some of these were for years agnostics, but have passed through to a higher plane and stage.

"For myself, I can testify to the knowl-

edge of, and to the loving help from, God day by day and from year to year, for nearly half a century. And in this I am by no means unique or exceptional; thousands upon thousands can testify similarly, and their numbers are increasing, both actually and relatively, with the progress of knowledge and science in the world. To me God has long been more real than ever was my devoted mother, and readier to give me help in little matters and in great. No pastor, or physician, or wise teacher, has been so sure a guide in any special sphere as the Almighty God—my spiritual Father and Great Physician and ever-present Helper—has ever been ready to prove himself in my need and faith. The truth is not a matter of spiritual belief. It is the realest and most practical truth of my every-day life."

"In your experience and conviction you are certainly to be envied. I wish I had such faith."

"Why, then, do you not have it? God

is ready to give it to you, if you will ask it,—if you will take it."

"But I lack the belief, or the evidences that give belief, that such an experience is possible to me."

"You remember, perhaps, the story of the atheist, who, turning doubtfully toward the light, dropped on his knees, and cried out in prayer: "O God, if there be a God, save my soul, if I've got a soul!" Such a prayer God will welcome from one who comes unable to pray more confidently, but who is ready to receive added light as it is given to him. Are you willing to kneel with me now in prayer, while I ask help from God for you in fresh spiritual knowledge?"

"I am, even though it be in doubt."

We two knelt side by side. With my arm about my friend, I talked with God as one who knew God and trusted him fully. I spoke of my companion and his need, and asked help for him as God saw that need and could relieve it. Then I asked

my doubting companion to speak to God for himself, and tell him not what he doubted about, but what he would like to attain to or to receive. The feeble cry of the doubter went up to God; it was heard; it was heeded. And that was the beginning of a new day to that darkened soul. The light that then faintly dawned shone more and more unto the perfect, or complete, day. He who had before had doubts as to the very existence of God, came to be not only a firm believer himself, but he grew to have power in bringing others into the full light and joy of God's service and favor. God is ever ready to work wonders for and with those who come to him in need and desire.

XIV

Inconsistency of Christian Doubters

A strange tendency of the human mind is to accept readily much that might seem most wonderful and contrary to all reason, while at the same time rejecting as unworthy of belief, or at all events seriously doubting, what is far less wonderful, and what is not at variance with the dictates of the soundest reason. This unmistakable fact is recognized in the telling adage, "Many a man who does not believe in a God believes in ghosts."

All of us have known men who reject the Bible as a guide of life, or as worthy of consideration as the most remarkable book in the world, who are disturbed for days or weeks when they see for the first time in the month the new moon over their left shoulder, and who seriously hesi-

tate to begin any fresh undertaking on Friday. It is a well-authenticated fact that many an unbeliever or declared opponent of Christianity is positively affected in his life course by the influence of signs and omens, and lucky and unlucky days and seasons.

We generally speak of "superstition" and "religion" as if they were two entirely different forces, affecting entirely different classes of persons; but it might be difficult for us to draw the line between the two forces even as the line exists in our own minds. It would be still more difficult for us to describe just the sort of persons who are influenced by the one force, and not by the other. This truth, or the inevitable confusion with reference to this truth, should be borne in mind in dealing with those who evidently have an open mind with reference to the Bible and Christian truth, yet who seem unable to accept the Bible record of some prominent Christian truth. It may, in their case, be simply a

result of a peculiar working of their mind, and another indication of the strange tendency of human nature. Such persons deserve considerate, sympathetic treatment, in order that they may be helped into fuller and clearer light. They do not mean to be unreasonable, even though they are.

A young Christian worker came to me, one day, with a confession of a doubt, because he thought I was always ready to give sympathetic counsel to an honest doubter. The young worker had been for some time prominent in Young Men's Christian Association work, and in religious effort among university students. He was himself a university graduate, and was considering the Christian ministry for his life work. He had the reputation and the appearance of an earnest and devoted Christian man. There was nothing that seemed to suggest the caviler or the doubter, even when he confessed his doubt. It was evident that what he believed he believed heartily, and

that he would be glad to believe more. He seemed to be sorry that he had to confess any doubt.

After speaking of his manner of life and his habits of thought, as if he would have it understood that he was not inclined to a doubting mood with reference to Bible truths, he said, half hesitatingly:

"The only thing that troubles me in the story of Jesus is the narrative of his miraculous birth."

"Do you think there was anything exceptional in the life and work and words of Jesus?" I asked.

"Oh! I think he was in all things exceptional. I don't doubt him. I trust myself fully to his guidance, and for my salvation. It is only about the circumstances of his birth that I have any doubt."

"How do you think Jesus compared with the people of his generation?"

"I think no one was for a moment to be compared with him. He was way above all men of his day and generation."

"How do you think it was as to the men who had gone before him, the wisest and the best and the greatest of them,—men like Isaiah and Jeremiah and Solomon and David and Samuel and Joshua and Caleb and Moses, and other leaders of thought and action?"

"Oh! I think he was far above them all. None of them was to be compared with him. I have no doubt on that point. It is, as I tell you, only about the matter of his miraculous birth that I have any doubt."

"You think, then, that Jesus came into this world with the world as it was, and drew a new line of being and character and conduct in it, setting up here a new standard for men, even the best and wisest and greatest of men, to imitate and to strive to live up to from that time forward? Do you believe that the example and teachings of Jesus, his work and his words, had any influence over his fellows while he was here in this world, and that they have continued to have this until the present day?"

"Yes, I most firmly believe that. I believe there was never anything like it. He was never equaled or approached. I have no doubts on these points. My only doubt, as I said to you, is about the story of his miraculous birth."

"You speak of the influence of the work and words of Jesus, not to say anything about the incitement and the new motive and the help furnished in his death and resurrection,—what do you think has been the result in the lives of those who, since his day, have sought to live up to his standard? What proportion of his followers compare favorably with his example?"

"I do not think that any one of them could be compared with him."

"Not even with his example and teachings and influence before them, and with two thousand years of progress and moral growth in the world's history? Not a single one of the most progressive pupils has come up to the standard of the old-time teacher?"

"Not one. Oh! I tell you, I count Jesus all by himself. No one was, or is, to be compared with him."

"Well now, my friend, just look at the case as you present it to me. You say that you believe that two thousand years ago there appeared in this world one who was greatly superior to his fellows, one who was far above the wisest and the greatest and the best who had ever lived on earth; and that during the years of his life he was such a teacher and example, and had such an influence on his disciples and his generation, that the world feels it to this day; that he was such a Being that you are ready to trust him as a Saviour for this life and the next; and that, even with all the teachings that he gave for men's guidance, and with all the helps that the church which he organized has set at work for good in the passing centuries, not one of his followers or imitators has approached his standard of spiritual and moral excellence. You say you believe all this, yet

you cannot believe the Bible record that there was anything peculiar about his coming into this world and life. You prefer to believe that he was born just like every other man in order to be unlike every one who ever had been, or who then was, or who ever was to be.

"That belief of yours, my friend, is a great deal more difficult than my belief. I am glad that my mind isn't subjected to such a test as yours is. Believing what you and I believe as to the utterly unique life and character of Jesus, and of his place in the universe, it seems to me most reasonable to suppose that there was something peculiar in the coming of such a being into this world; and it would seem most unreasonable to suppose that he was born into this world just like an ordinary man. Don't you yourself think so?"

"Yes, I do, when I look at it in that light," said the doubter.

And it will often be found, with many another doubter of some point of Christian

truth, that he fully accepts and firmly believes more wonderful things than that which he doubts; and that his accepted beliefs are more reasonable, if taken with the one which he doubts, than without it. Christianity is more consistent with itself than would be any substitute for it according to our fancies or preferences.

Christianity is more reasonable than are the beliefs of those who deny or doubt its claims. This is true as to the more prominent unbelievers and scoffers. It is also likely to be the case with the doubts of honest Christians who have troubles with particular points of belief. They are almost sure to be ready to accept without a question truths that are less in accordance with reason than that which troubles them. In view of this truth, it is well that one who would help honest doubters should bring out by his questions this phase of their unreasonableness. It is not too close an adherence to reason, but a lack of it, that multiplies doubters in the world.

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Trumbull, H. Clay 1830-1903.

How to deal with doubts and doubters

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